



## Whooping Cough Fact Sheet

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### What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a highly contagious bacterial infection, and one of the most common vaccine-preventable diseases in the United States.

### How does whooping cough spread?

Whooping cough is usually spread by coughing or sneezing. If untreated, an infected person can spread whooping cough for several weeks.

### What are whooping cough symptoms?

The disease usually starts with mild cold symptoms or cough, which can turn into severe coughing spells. The coughing fits can take place for 10 weeks or more.

- In infants, the cough may be mild or absent. However, infants may have a symptom known as "apnea," which is a pause in breathing.
- Infants and children can cough violently and rapidly, until the air is gone from their lungs and they're forced to inhale with a loud "whooping" sound. This extreme coughing can result in vomiting and exhaustion. Illness is generally less severe in adolescents and adults.

### Babies and whooping cough

Babies are especially vulnerable to whooping cough. They often catch the illness from older siblings, parents, or other caregivers.

- More than half of infants less than 1 year of age who get the disease must be hospitalized.
- About 1 in 5 infants with whooping cough get pneumonia (lung infection).
- About 1 in 100 infants will have convulsions.
- In rare cases (1 in 100), whooping cough can be deadly, especially in infants less than 1 year of age.

### How can I prevent whooping cough?

#### DTaP vaccine

Infants and children under 7 should receive the DTaP vaccine. To maximize protection, all 5 doses of DTaP are needed on time according to the recommended immunization schedule.

#### Tdap vaccine

Adolescents and adults need the Tdap vaccine. The protection received from DTaP, the childhood vaccine, fades over time. Adolescents and adults need Tdap, even if they were completely vaccinated as children. Getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for family members with and caregivers of new infants.

### Where can I get more information about whooping cough?

- Your [local health department](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health](#)
- [Pertussis \(Whooping Cough\) - What You Need to Know](#) (CDC)